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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 7, 2004

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Johnson: Electronic Medical Records Can Save Lives

Health Subcomm. Chair Addresses Health Info Tech Summit

Johnson Legislation Adopted by Presidential Executive Order

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Nancy Johnson told a health summit today in Washington that we must move rapidly to adopt a health information technology infrastructure to save lives, improve the quality of care we can deliver, and reduce the administrative costs of health care.

“Complete, secure electronic medical records and e-prescribing technology can help save lives. These technologies can go a long way toward eliminating preventable medical errors resulting from misread handwritten prescriptions and incomplete or missing records,” said Johnson, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee.

Johnson made her remarks at the invitation of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson at a specially-convened Secretarial Summit today, attended by health information technology industry leaders.

“Health information technology promises huge benefits, and we need to move quickly across many fronts to capture these benefits,” Secretary Thompson said. “I asked the leaders of the health IT community to join me at this event to see how we can press down on the accelerator and bring about the benefits of health IT even faster. The benefits are enormous, but the task is also enormously complex. We need more than a business-as-usual approach.”

In an Executive Order issued last week, the President created the position of the National Health Information Technology Coordinator, reporting directly to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, who will guide the creation of a national health information system so patients and health care providers can exchange and read electronic medical records. Secretary Thompson announced the appointment of David J. Brailer, M.D., Ph.D., to serve in this new position.

“The American people deserve a state-of-the-art health care system that utilizes comprehensive electronic medical records and fills prescriptions at the touch of a screen, not by pen and pad. I commend the President and Secretary Thompson for creating a post to guide our journey toward

electronic medical records, a necessary step of profound importance to the future of health quality. I thank Dr. Brailer for taking on this responsibility and I encourage him to put the pedal to the metal in this effort.”

Brailer fills a position first put forth in Johnson’s legislation, *The National Health Information Infrastructure Act of 2003* (H.R. 2915). Johnson’s bill authorizes a newly-created National Health Information Officer to work with public and private health care entities to accelerate the adoption of national health information technology communication standards.

Studies have shown preventable medical errors – including misread prescriptions and incorrect diagnoses based on incomplete medical records – to be the eighth-leading cause of death in the U.S.

Brailer’s task in building a National Health Information Infrastructure will include:

- Setting privacy and security standards;
- Creating incentives to use information technology;
- Creating a common medical language. In 2003, HHS signed an agreement to license a standardized medical vocabulary developed by the College of American Pathologists called SNOWMED (Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine);
- Defining the functions of an electronic medical record;
- Promoting federal health information standards.

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